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## Church works to feed the hungry

By SHARON LEE TEGLER, For The Capital

With vacation time in full swing, people are taking a break from their normal routines. For the hungry, there is no break. In fact, the help they rely on evaporates with summer's heat. Donations sputter and food pantry shelves empty.

Fortunately, Severna Park United Methodist Church is there for the needy, providing year-round support to the Light House shelter, Carpenter's Kitchen and the Severna Park Assistance Network. Support for these charities is coordinated by Katherine Nutile, Stuart Mozer and Karen Myers.

Nutile is co-coordinator of Carpenter's Kitchen, an inner city food program operating at Mt. Vernon United Methodist Church in Baltimore and funded solely by donations from other churches. Mt. Vernon UMC began serving meals on Saturdays 24 years ago because no urban food programs were open on weekends.

Today, the kitchen serves meals 52 Saturdays a year, aided by 18 different Methodist churches that take turns providing and preparing the food. Severna Park UMC participates five to seven times a year, serving between 170 and 300 guests.

"When we go to Carpenter's Kitchen, we bring enough volunteers to set up the hall, cook the food and serve it," said Nutile. "We set tables and conduct meals family style. Meals are structured but are warm and friendly - nothing at all like what most people envision a soup kitchen to be."

Nutile said guests aren't necessarily homeless but financially stressed, especially at month's end. They arrive in groups or families including elderly people on fixed incomes and individuals who are disabled or chronically mentally ill.

The church's most recent stint at Carpenter's Kitchen occurred July 24, summer's hottest day with temperatures registering 105 degrees in the city. Regardless, everyone enjoyed themselves.

Mozer, mission coordinator for the Light House shelter, also works there as a resident assistant so he's very knowledgeable about the program.

Located in Annapolis, the Light House shelter currently houses 16 men, 15 women and a few families. It's not just an in and out program.

"Residents live there for 90 days and follow a structured program dealing with issues like unemployment, domestic violence and substance abuse," said Mozer. "We help them find employment and get them on the road to recovery, so they can move back into society or family life. They must save 80 percent of their earnings and remain drug and alcohol free. Though it's difficult turning someone's life around in 90 days, we have a 75 percent success rate."

A new Light House shelter is under construction at Parole with 45 beds, five apartments for families, a production kitchen and medical facilities, tripling the number of city residents that can be accommodated.

Severna Park UMC aids the shelter financially and otherwise. Members get together and pack 80 to 100 lunches for residents a couple times a month and occasionally prepare food on-site. They hosted a dinner for the residents July 31.

Karen Myers and Diane Dodson are the church's representatives to SPAN, an organization that provides food and financial assistance to clients referred to them by the county. Myers said the depressed economic situation has caused donations to SPAN to shrink while the level of need has increased. However, SPUMC's congregation has remained very generous.

As with the other initiatives, the missions committee contributes a portion of the budget to SPAN annually and dedicates communion offerings to the organization twice a year. Food donations are collected weekly in baskets by church entrances, and there are food drives for SPAN like the church youth group's annual "Souper Bowl of Caring" held on Super Bowl Sunday.

Associate Pastor Nicole Christopher, who oversees the food missions, said they are one of the most exciting things about the church. She added that the entire congregation gets involved, even developing a new program, Kindness Kitchen, which provides meals for residents who have experienced sickness or a death in the family.